



by Park Ranger Mark Willis

**C**ast members of the popular TV reality show “Survivor” could learn a thing or two from Ally, a small, long-haired, mixed-breed dog whose amazing saga of survival is well known by many of Lillydale Campground’s veteran campers. Lillydale is situated on the south shore of Dale Hollow Lake.

Ally’s story began during the winter of 2005-2006, when she was abandoned at the top of the hill near St. John’s Cemetery on Lillydale Rd., with no food or warm place to stay.

She eventually made her way down the hill to Lillydale Campground – which was closed for the season – where she stayed for several months, scrounging for food and getting by the best she could. During the cold, wet winter, she made her home in a drainage culvert.

There she lived alone until the arrival

# The Survivor

of Campground Park Attendants Dale and Kate Driskill early in the spring, prior to the campground’s scheduled opening date. Dale and Kate were unaware of the little canine camper, and her culvert campsite farther down the hill, but soon realized they weren’t the park’s only inhabitants. After using the outside grill, they usually collected grease drippings in a little can, and set it aside. Before long, they noticed their drippings can was always licked clean the next morning. They first thought it might be a skunk, but one day they finally spotted the elusive white dog making her way across the campground.

Abandoned and frightened, the little dog kept her distance from both park attendants and rangers who tried to befriend her or help her find her a new home.

The campground opened in May and, despite friendly overtures by many campers, no one could even get close to the beautiful little dog. “Sleight of paw” towels and shirts were sometimes “borrowed” from campsites to make a soft bed in the culvert, but no one complained.

Unknown to the little dog, she had become the unofficial campground mascot. All of the regular campers were rooting for her, hoping she’d eventually learn to trust someone.

Several months passed before she finally overcame her fear and distrust, prompted perhaps by the arrival of a family with two black dogs – a large one and a small one. The little white dog watched from a distance as the black dogs were showered with love by their caretakers. The man and woman who owned the black pair began to talk quietly to her, called her “sweetie”, but didn’t try to catch her. Gradually, the little dog – whom they named “Ally” – came a little closer, and began playing with the big dog.

One afternoon the family hooked the boat trailer to their truck and began driving away. Ally ran after the truck as fast as she could. She apparently realized she liked this family and didn’t want to be left behind. She followed them to the boat ramp and, when she ran up to the boat, they invited her in. She hesitated only a moment. From that day on, little Ally had a family. They washed her, combed the tangles from her fur, and gave her food. That night she slept inside, and has never had to sleep outside since.

When the family packed to leave, Ally went with them. They took her to a veterinarian for a check up, and showered her with toys and hugs – just like the two black dogs.

During the 2007 recreation season, park attendants and several longtime campers were delighted to see a familiar face (Ally’s white, furry one) back at Lillydale Campground. Her new owners – who prefer to remain anonymous, “this is Ally’s story, not ours” – said she was a bit sad and maybe worried at first when they neared the campground entrance. She seemed to be having flashbacks of her earlier survival at Lillydale, when she was on her own. After repeated assurances that she wouldn’t be left behind, she eventually calmed down and enjoyed the rest of her stay at the campground.

When it was time to leave, Ally went too. Although she’s proven to everyone that she’s a master of survival camping, she obviously has no desire to repeat the experience. She clearly prefers, instead, the life of a pampered pooch.



Ally with her adopted family at the scene of her survival saga.